

SAN FRANCISCO ART ASSOCIATION BULLETIN

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Expressionism in Sculpture

By JACQUES SCHNIER

Most artists, critics and writers on the subject of art are agreed by now that there are two broad classifications to sculpture: the Realistic and the Expressionistic. Realistic sculpture includes those works which are or strive to be fac-simile reproductions of nature, imitative portraiture which shows the very wrinkles and the veins under the skin. In general it encompasses that group of work in which everything has been made subservient to the truthfulness of historical or dramatic detail or the anatomical accuracy with which movement and form are portrayed. Expressionism, however, as the name implies, is (Pfister, *Expression in Art*, 1920) "... the endeavor to express through art, not the external world but the inner self of the artist, in which process the objective content is but a means to this end." Expressionistic sculpture then, is the field in which the tender or the vigorous emotions of the inner self are portrayed; where feelings of love as well as those of hate, jealousy and other passions are released; where even phantasies, not usually sanctioned by society, find an outlet; the thirst for vengeance, sadistic and masochistic tendencies and the ambition for greatness. Here wishes and longings of day-dreams are fulfilled and the outpourings from the great reservoir of man's unconscious self are objectified.

Now because in expressionism, the sculptor is interested in portraying the inner self and not the external world, it does not follow that his work need be divorced completely from forms as they appear in nature; neither does it mean that his work shall be a close approximation of the naturalistic. To the contrary, it has been found by those who have made a deep and penetrating study of human thinking (the Freudian psychoanalysts), that expressionistic art can run the whole gamut from work that is highly objective (where a hand, an arm or a head are readily identified by the spectator) to that which is completely subjective (where forms are distorted or abstract and have meanings not readily or impossible of being understood by the spectator). They have found that a Romantic statue of the 19th century can be just as expressive, with relation to inner content, as an abstraction by Brancusi or Arp, or a carved pole of a primitive sav-



MOTHER AND CHILD (Marble, Cut Direct)
By ADELINE KENT

Sculpture Exhibition Now Showing at the
San Francisco Museum of Art

age; that amongst the Maori, Cambodian, Egyptian, Roman and Victorian carvings as well as the whittlings of the psychopath there may be found work that can be readily classified as expressionistic sculpture. And in certain cases, the inner meaning of these works, so far apart in style and objectivity, are found to be identical.

From this it follows that no one period of the past or present can claim exclusive rights to expressionistic art; that the Abstractionists, the Constructionists, the Sur-Realists and the Dadaists, granting an inner meaning to all their work, have no greater claim to expressionism than a Michelangelo, a Kolbe or a St. Gaudens. It

means that no longer can one say primitive plastics are more spiritual or have more inner content than Renaissance sculpture. If we stop and reflect quietly on these facts, we see that if a soul, a spiritual quality, an expressiveness or an inner meaning is possible of existing in sculpture irrespective of its period, then there are left only two things (setting aside material and size) that differentiate one sculpture from another, a native Gabun statue from one executed by Rodin, or an Egyptian carving from one by Brancusi, and these are: Style and Objectivity.

From a spectator's point of view this objectivity is an extremely important item, for granting the spectator being attuned and interested to what the artist has to say, his ability to understand and appreciate the work of art is dependent to a great extent on its objectiveness. In regard to this Pfister makes a statement to this effect: The more objective the work being, the more certain is the spectator as to what it contains for him; the more subjective it is, so much the more mysterious and unfathomable it becomes. To illustrate this, one might conceive of an artist pouring out his innermost feelings in a highly subjective creation, i.e., an abstraction, which to the spectator is completely meaningless, due to his inability to interpret it. This is comparable to a poet who expresses himself in an unknown language or in a tongue of his own creation which is unintelligible to his audience. It is true that by this method there is the possibility of obtaining pleasant relationship of sounds and word patterns and rhythms, but it has been found that these superficial qualities alone do not provide very intense aesthetic satisfaction. In the same way the line, form, pattern and balance in an abstract sculpture have little to offer that is penetrating or lasting, in spite of the fact that the work may have deep inner meaning and be expressive either of gentle tender love, intense hatred, or other emotions.

There may be those who would question the necessity or desirability of the sculptor being concerned with whether his work was understood or not; whether a spectator found it comprehensible or whether he found it meaningless. Pfister, who clearly saw this problem, has stated: "Such a passive egotism is bound to lead the artist to withdrawal from the world and not to a conquest of the world, even though it be but symbolical victory. And in answer to those who would even encourage this withdrawal, he replies that it is "The socializing character of artistic work which counteracts introversion and prevents the pathological catastrophe of being swallowed up in the abyss of their own ego." To restate what this extremely important sentence is telling us would be to say that introversion is where one is immersed in a deep phantasy life which in itself is pathological inasmuch as it is useless both to the individual and to society. Whereas, when one is enabled through the medium of art to take hold of these inner phantasies, these gnawing emotions, and extrovert them, socialize them; that is, metaphorically, to throw them out of his self into the carving of a sculpture piece or the modeling of a figure to be offered for the enjoyment of a spectator, he tends to build up his pride and his grip on Reality which would be regularly destroyed where a strong phantasy life has no means of expression. In addition he then is able through his work to offer to others who are immersed in phantasy life but incapable of expressing it, comfort and consolation and in return reaps their gratitude and admiration.

Albert Bender has presented two oil paintings to the San Francisco Museum of Art, "Young Girl," by Geneve Rixford Sargaent, and a landscape by Moya Del Pino, entitled, "Downieville Hills."



DRAWING OF AN EXPRESSIONISTIC STATUE (Partly Subjective)
Selected by Jacques Schnier from the Collection of Dr. Joseph Thompson.

Maurice Sterne Interviewed

We chatted together during a luncheon hour in the Art School Cafeteria.

With his students seated about the adjoining tables, Maurice Sterne earnestly, gently, surveyed the personnel of his classes and discussed the part an art school played in the development of talent.

"What do you feel is the real function of an art school?" he was asked. (I had in mind painters that had come to the fore in recent years and whose work expressed the directness of souls unhampered by influences or training.) "We have undergone a change in the past 30 years," he answered. "We have discredited academic training and have found nothing to take its place. There has been a craze for the naive in painting, but only a great man can survive when self-taught. Take Rousseau for example—it is not his lack of sophistication that has made his work live—rather is it his good taste, his sense of selectiveness, his exquisite color. In France they have experimented with this idea. Matisse's School, years ago, did away with all that savored of the Academy—and what was the result? Henri Matisse was so disgusted with the horrible lack of drawing that confronted him he brought into the studio an old plaster cast and set his students to work.

"I have no especial feeling for academic art," he went on, "but there is a great tradition that has been handed down to us that we cannot willfully overthrow. The student of today is handicapped—he is not close enough to the master. It was not a coincidence that the period of the Renaissance produced such giants—men like Leonardo and Rafael learned their craft—they had gone through all the necessary steps. When they left the studio of the master they had already demonstrated their ability to stand alone. The world is tired of students attempting to be artists over night. That sort of thing cannot live."

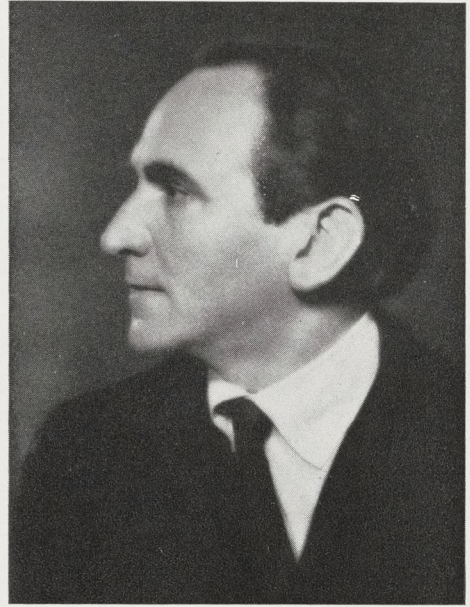
"Do you think it wise, Mr. Sterne, for American students to study abroad?" I questioned.

"It is not a matter of where one studies—it is with whom one studies. However, if a student goes abroad it should not be for too long. The advantage of travel lies primarily in viewing world treasures at first hand."

"Has America as yet produced a school of painting—something inherently its own?"

"We are still too young. To quote Henry James: 'We are still planting the roots; we cannot yet hope for the flowers!' There is really no great American tradition in Art. The American Primitives are no different from the British, Scandinavian or Russian. The only difference lies in the portrayal of type and costume.

"In Art we have two things to consider—lan-



MAURICE STERNE

guage and content. I cannot find any new language in early American painting; it is just a question of different content."

Going through the history of American painting, Mr. Sterne laid emphasis on three names: Homer, Ryder and Eakins. "And yet," he said, "I can find absolutely nothing in Ryder that places him as a typical American, either in language or content. Eakins was not so facile as his contemporaries. He was more honest—therein lies his force. But he was still the offspring of a British heritage."

"But," I suggested timidly, "there is such a thing as an American consciousness, an American point of view. Why should there not be an expression of this? In poetry we have Walt Whitman. Why has America been so reticent in Art?"

"Because," Maurice Sterne answered quickly, "the British have produced the literary giants and we have inherited their language. Remember the Anglo-Saxon tongue is our tool of expression. It was natural for Walt Whitman to build upon this heritage. Living at a time when the old order was crumbling, he embodied in his work the change that was being wrought in the life about him.

"But in painting it is different. The great Latin schools have influenced us. It will take another century before all is amalgamated.

"Some American painters that are attracting attention are too superficial," he continued. "Their work does not represent America. It is not Art in the fullest sense of the word. Some of it is well done, but, oh," he added drily,

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The Local Sculpture Show

There are a few places dotted over the globe where sculpture has flourished. You can count them on your fingers. In Asia Minor, the old Hittites and then the Assyrians did great work. In Egypt and Greece, around to India and China and Java, then over to Mexico and up to British Columbia (the nearest point to us) where the Columbian Indians made totem poles, masks, etc., and back to Africa, where Negro art grew, as fine as any. Of course we cannot omit the Romanesque period which spread over Europe after the so-called Dark Ages.

Most of us have seen actual work or reproductions of work from these great periods and places, and it doesn't take a great amount of intelligence to form some idea or standard of what is best and highest in the sculptor's art.

In all these places sculptors assisted the religions, recorded history, and made utensils for every-day use. With the advent of science most of these things are made by machine, stamped out in series, and the sculptor's art was swamped and dragged down to a very low depth. Imitation of work already done, copy and recopy, and the whole art soon lost its vitality.

In the last few years, following the fashion to probe, investigate and examine, the case of sculpture and her malady is solved. The cure is, start with a block of stone or a slab of wood and do it direct. There is all the evidence in the world that the "old boys" who worked in the great periods worked in that way. Let anyone who thinks he knows something of sculpture try it. In a few hours he will know how much of the A B C of sculpture he possesses, how much alphabet, how much language.

In this exhibition there is above all a big effort to find a sculptural language in stone and wood, metal and terra-cotta, and I, for one, am much pleased with the results.

If our society, with its high standards of living, wants something said about it, something recorded in the noblest way man has ever developed, several of these young sculptors could do the trick, and the language they have been working in these ten or twelve years would blossom out.

It is no secret that the imitation goddesses, Greek, Italian Renaissance, French Renaissance,

for United States public buildings, have been done by members of the National Sculpture Society. They were modeled in clay and turned over to stone carvers to reproduce in stone, the sculptors not knowing much about stone, and the stone carvers not much about sculpture. A great deal of money has been spent.

Sometime I should like to see this sort of competition: Let one of the cut-direct boys here in the West challenge one of the big goddess-modeling boys of the East. Give them each a block of stone and hammer and chisels; call them to the center of the ring, whisper something about low punches, and say go to it! The man from the East would say before the match was made, "This is not my game. I'm not trained." But, it is the game of sculpture.

I am sure there are many out here itching for such a contest, but more than that, they are itching for something real to do. They are longing for some sensible building to decorate with great reliefs telling about the people around us, how they live and hope and die, and a sensible city plan, where great monuments would accent stages in her growth.

R. S.

Exhibition of Graphic Arts

The first Exhibition of Graphic Arts and Water Colors, sponsored by the San Francisco Art Association, will open with a preview Friday evening, September 13. The awards, announced as we go to press, are as follows:

Water Colors Prize went to "Saints and Sinners," by Moya Del Pino.

Pencil Drawing Prize to "Head," by Ralph Stackpole.

Etching Prize to "Market No. 2," by Esther Bruton.

Wood Engraving Prize to "Moraga," by Mallette Dean.

Lithograph Prize to "Fallen Monarch," by Ray Bertrand.

Maurice Sterne Interviewed

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"there's nothing worse than bad art well done.

"Most of the mural painting one sees nowadays has gone against the whole tradition of mural painting. The first function of a painting of any kind is that it must stay within the limitations of its frame. It is well for our students of mural painting to know that murals must be more than a series of illustrations. Without an integral organization they are bad, irrespective of who does them."

We looked about, but the students had gone back to their classes. Quietly drawing out his watch, Mr. Sterne indicated that our interview was at an end.

M. R.

How the Pendulum Swings

PART OF A LETTER FROM FLORENCE SWIFT

"On my trip to Europe my main object was to see the best moderns and to follow Giotto through Italy. However, I found myself more interested in the Byzantine which seemed to tie so closely with the moderns that it made me realize more and more how the pendulum swings.

"The most obvious thing in both periods is the way the two-dimensional quality is held on the wall, without holes poked into the building. No perspective, but a complete restfulness, a feeling of expansion rather than contraction, held in perfect balance and harmony.

"One of the great means of giving space is the pulling of forms apart as if looking up and down on them from the same point of observation. The Persians, moderns, Chinese and Byzantine understood this. Things growing larger as you go back and the wall is the important thing not the subject. Planes rise from the horizontal to the vertical.

"I do not think any great art movement will start again until some obvious laws are again realized and the complexities of the Renaissance mostly forgotten. A great work of art certainly has to have in it something of the supernatural, a revealing of hidden qualities. If this generation is going back to art for walls of public buildings instead of the easel picture it will ultimately combine the qualities of the best that has been with the most vital of the new.

"The most vital of the new seems to be the discovery of color. The most outstanding examples of this to me were Leger, Braque, and Picasso and the best examples I saw were in a collection of Picasso and Braque owned by Paul Rosenberg and the outstanding examples of Leger were in a modern collection owned by Sidney Janovitz in New York where the rooms were actually built around and for the paintings. When you saw big groups of these things and the progressive steps the artist went through from year to year you felt as if you had never experienced a color awakening before. I was lucky to see the largest collection of Picasso through M. Vollard by his kindness in phoning M. Rosenberg who put at my disposal his enormous collection and then I also saw his private collection.

"In his dining room were five outstanding Picassos, not another picture. While we were looking at them he carelessly kicked back a corner of his rug and there in marble mosaic were the oblong still lifes of Braque. I gasped: "but how did you get a stone cutter to do this and choose such colors and textures?" "Oh, Braque did it himself." They are superb and show the very new going back to the solid old. You feel

Douglas Tilden

The BULLETIN records the passing of Douglas Tilden, venerable California sculptor, on August 6.

Possibly the last written expression of the artist, addressed to the ART ASSOCIATION BULLETIN, and written on his 75th birthday, appeared in the July issue.

Tilden's monumental works are typical of his period, and are too well known to be here reviewed. Among his best known pieces are "The Football Player" on the campus of the University of California and "The Native Sons Monument" at the junction of Mason and Market streets, San Francisco.

In his time the greatest of California sculptors, a man who was given many important commissions and honors, Tilden died in abject poverty.

A recent commentator has said that such a thing could not happen in Europe, where "Once a great man, always a great man."

In Douglas Tilden's story there is, indeed, a reflection upon society, itself.

Victor Amantoff has been commissioned to paint ten panels in the new George Washington High School. This work, which is under the auspices of PWA, is scheduled to be completed within six months.

Helen Forbes and Dorothy Puccinelli have been awarded the contract for the decoration of the Merced Post-office.

Moya Del Pino and Frank Bergman have won the award for the murals in the Post-office at Stockton.

Over a hundred designs were submitted to the jury in Washington.

Junius Cravens, art critic of The News, will give a course in practical designing for the stage, beginning September 2, at 25 Joyce street. Enrollments or inquiries regarding classes may be made by calling Douglas 0165.

The editorial offices of California Arts and Architecture have moved into new and larger quarters at 2404 West 7th street, Los Angeles.

that there is nothing synthetic about building in Europe, no hurry.

"Tremendous emotions sway the old and the new and I found myself making continual comparisons and wondering why we had strayed so far afield. I hope the pendulum is swinging for a new and enlivened era."

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September Exhibitions in Local Galleries

Art Center, 730 Montgomery Street: August 26-September 21, Group Show of Members' Oils. September 23-October 5, Marguerite Blasingame of Honolulu—Drawings.

Amberg-Hirth, 165 Post Street: Regular Exhibitions Arts and Crafts.

Art Students' League of San Francisco: September exhibitions will be by members of the Artists' Cooperative Gallery, which includes a group of twenty-five painters, fifteen water-colorists, fifteen etchers, and ten photographers. August 26-September 7, Paintings by Moya del Pino. Group show by Ansel Adams, Horace Bristol, Imogene Cunningham and Peter Stackpole. A cooperative forum will be conducted by the latter artists this fall, under the auspices of the League.

California Palace of the Legion of Honor: Soviet Art (under auspices of the American-Russian Institute). Porcelains, from the collection of Mrs. A. B. Spreckels. Old master paintings. Monthly art exhibition by Californians. Art work by students of the College of the Pacific. Maurice Sterne paintings.

Courvoisier: Miscellaneous paintings of old masters.

M. H. deYoung Memorial Museum: Textile Art Through the Ages. Guatemala textiles and present costumes collected by Ruth Reeves. Illustrative photography.

Gelber-Lilienthal: Water-colors by Gyda Skar.

S. and W. Gump: September 1-September 21, general exhibition of paintings and prints. September 23-October 12, water-colors by Barse Miller.

Oakland Art Gallery: Abstractions by Paul Klee.

San Francisco Museum of Art: African Negro Art; Oceanic Art, Print-makers. To September 28, Thirty Years of Sculpture in San Francisco. To September 29, Paintings and Drawings by Maurice Sterne. September 6-October 6, British Printing. September 13-October 13, First Graphic Arts Exhibition of the San Francisco Art Association.

Roy Vernon Sowers: English Society of Graver-Printers—in color.

San Francisco Museum of Art

SCHEDULE OF FREE GALLERY TALKS

- WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 8:30 P. M.
Bronzes of Benin Yvonne Dane
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 8:30 P. M.
Contemporary Sculpture Jacques Schnier
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 3:30 P. M.
Final Lecture on Exhibition of African Art. Yvonne Dane
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 8:30 P. M.
30 Years of Sculpture in California Jacques Schnier
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 3:30 P. M.
General Tour Katherine Caldwell
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 3:30 P. M.
Sculpture Primitives Beniamino Bufano
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 8:30 P. M.
Sculpture Beniamino Bufano
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 8:30 P. M.
Contemporary Sculpture Jacques Schnier
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 8:30 P. M.
30 Years of Sculpture in California Ralph Stackpole
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 8:30 P. M.
Sculpture Exhibition Jacques Schnier
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 3:30 P. M.
General Tour Katherine Caldwell